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SUBJECT: ROMA UPDATE: MAYOR TRIES TO DEPORT FAMILIES, NDI
FEARS VOTE-BUYING IN UPCOMING ELECTIONS, EMBASSY INCREASES
OUTREACH

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Embassy continues to be heavily involved in promoting human rights and integration among Slovakia's minority communities, the Roma in particular. In the past month, the Emboffs have:
-- Visited a northern village in which the mayor is seeking to move 35-40 Roma to a small, three-unit house in another nearby village so they will be the other town's "problem;"
-- Heard both optimism about Roma political participation, as well as concerns from NDI about the possibility of political parties "buying votes" in Roma communities in June's parliamentary elections;
-- Published op-ed pieces and hosted events highlighting Roma issues and putting activists in touch with opinion leaders.
END SUMMARY.

MAYOR WANTS TO DEPORT DELINQUENT (ROMA) RENTERS

2. (SBU) In March, the media reported that the Mayor and city council of Puchov was resettling four Roma families to the smaller, nearby village of Nimnica, after the families failed to make rent payments in their public housing. Emboffs recently traveled to Puchov and Nimnica to meet with local officials and investigate the situation. The Mayor of Puchov told Poloff that the decision was "humanitarian," as the families have children and therefore could not simply be evicted. According to the Mayor, the families will remain citizens of Puchov despite their new home in Nimnica (which the city of Puchov purchased for them), and the children will still be enrolled in Puchov schools. The Mayor of Puchov hopes that the families will find it easier to make their rent payments in this less expensive housing.

3. (SBU) Other members of the Puchov city council, however, told us of their staunch opposition to the plan. They note that the (reportedly shabby) housing currently occupied by the families is near an area the city is planning to rehabilitate into a pedestrian shopping and dining district and that the Mayor is likely involved financially in this development and hopes to revamp the public housing into an engine for increased revenue. The Mayor told us that he "doesn't ask" what ethnicity the delinquent renters are, but that, as families with children, they deserve this "opportunity" in Nimnica.

4. (SBU) In contrast to the large, prosperous town of Puchov, Nimnica is a small village of 700. The Mayor of Nimnica described to us his town's opposition to the move. Deporting "undesirable" residents from one town to another sets a dangerous precedent, he noted, as there would be nothing to stop other towns -- particularly in Eastern Slovakia, where the majority of Slovakia's Roma live -- from

putting their citizens on buses and sending them to other localities. The Mayor of Nimnica showed us the house to which Puchov plans on moving its Roma; the three-unit, two-bathroom space is in disrepair, is unconnected to gas lines, and relies on a small septic tank for its sewer. It is by no means appropriate for such a large number of tenants.

15. (SBU) Additionally, Nimnica's Roma population -- already well-integrated in the small community -- fears that the addition of "troublemakers" from another town will cause a rift in the village, as all the Roma citizens will be blamed en masse for any stolen vegetables or missing chickens. The Mayor of Nimnica has, to date, sought to fight the forced relocation through administrative channels, denying building permits at the property in an attempt to forestall "make ready" of the property by Puchov. He sought the advice of Slovakia's Plenipotentiary for the Roma Minority, whose office told him to pursue legal action to halt the transfer; however, attorneys could find no legal grounds upon which to pursue court action.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: We are putting the Mayor of Nimnica and the Puchov city council in touch with NGOs -- including USAID contractor Partners for Democratic Change in Slovakia (PDCS) -- and activists with experience in Roma issues, conflict resolution, and "reconciliation." The Embassy will be actively and aggressively pursuing this issue through our actions at all levels. END COMMENT.

NDI OPTIMISTIC ABOUT ROMA PARTICIPATION, WARY OF TACTICS

17. (SBU) National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) head Zuzana Dzurikova told us April 27 that the Roma political candidates and activists it has trained have

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increased the community's visibility among national political parties. In addition to lobbying major political parties to include Roma issues in their platforms, NDI's trainees have held high-level meetings with the President, Chairman of parliament, Prime Minister, and other MPs in advance of June 17 elections. In addition, Roma candidates have places on several candidate lists -- including President Gasparovic's Movement for Democracy (HZD), which included a well-known Roma musician in the 5th position on its candidate list (NOTE: Despite this high placement, polling indicates that HZD is unlikely to win any seats in parliament. END NOTE). In addition, Free Forum (SF) has placed a Roma candidate on its list, but lower than the number of seats SF is likely to win; however, as SF is likely to pass the parliamentary threshold, this candidate will have to work to get enough "preferential votes" (votes directly for an individual candidate) to win one of the SF seats in the national council in June.

18. (SBU) Citing a continued decrease in voter turnout, NDI told us that they are concerned that vote buying will play an increasing role in this year's parliamentary elections, as unscrupulous parties attempt to pick up "easy votes" in Roma communities by paying up to SKK 100 (around USD 3) per vote. NDI has already heard some Roma "political activists" shopping deals like this around current opposition parties. COMMENT: We enlisted NDI to assist us in "putting the word on the street" that we will not have contact in the future with any candidate whom we suspect of buying or selling votes. END COMMENT.

AMBASSADOR HOSTS LUNCH IN HONOR OF ROMA DAY...

19. (U) In honor of International Roma Day (April 8), Ambassador hosted a Roma Day lunch for Roma activists and personalities (many of whom the Ambassador identified himself through his travels upcountry), in addition to Roma allies from the diplomatic corps and political parties. Over twenty

five people attended the lunch, including the GOS Plenipotentiary for Roma Affairs, representatives from the Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights and National Minorities, as well as a number of Mayors who have showed an effort to better integrate their Roma communities, Romani politicians, journalists, and activists. The lunch was an excellent venue through which to raise the profile of Roma issues, and allow networking among the stakeholders. The event is exemplary of process through which Embassy is continuing to focus momentum on the issue of Roma inclusion in society, and evidence of the progress activists and politicians are making.

...AND PUBLISHES OP-ED

¶10. (U) Also on International Roma Day, the Embassy placed an op-ed piece under the Ambassador's by-line in local daily SME (estimated readership: 368,000). The piece called for Slovakia to give Roma integration priority as part of its efforts toward full democratic potential. Citing his first hand experiences traveling through Slovakia and meeting with Roma leaders, the Ambassador called for Slovakia to take a strong stand against racism and to increase opportunity for Roma in education and the work place.

VALLEE